EM Recovery NEWS FLASH

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Recovery Act Workers Demolish Last of 24 Buildings and Structures at Los Alamos TA-21

LOS ALAMOS, N.M. – The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act has transformed the skyline of Los Alamos, creating an almost-bare mesa where 24 old buildings and structures once stood.

On Dec. 21, Recovery Act workers finished tearing down the last and largest of the 24 buildings and structures slated for removal with Recovery Act funding at Los Alamos National Laboratory's Technical Area 21 (TA-21), a project on track to be completed six months ahead of schedule that produced $16 million in savings. TA-21 housed Manhattan Project and Cold War facilities, many of which were built as long ago as the 1940s.

Workers on Dec. 21 demolished the last and largest of 24 buildings and structures at Los Alamos National Laboratory's Technical Area 21 slated for removal with Recovery Act funding.

The Lab received $212 million in Recovery Act funding to perform environmental remediation work, including the TA-21 building demolition project, excavation of Material Disposal Area B (MDA-B), the Lab's oldest waste disposal site, and the installation of 16 groundwater monitoring wells. The Lab used Recovery Act funding to hire 444 workers.

About $73 million funded the decontamination and demolition of the buildings and structures at TA-21, which reduced the Lab's footprint by 175,000 square feet. Efficient contracting and waste segregation saved about $16 million, which went toward additional work at TA-21 and MDA-B.

"The Recovery Act allowed us to do a whole lot of work well ahead of schedule," said Al Chaloupka, project director of building demolition at TA-21. "Our crews were thoroughly prepared and performed this work quickly, efficiently and safely."

Built in 1965, the 34,272-square-foot Tritium Science and Fabrication Facility building housed administrative offices and laboratories. Research for the nuclear rocket program known as Project Rover was conducted there.

Due to their age and the purposes they served, many of the buildings and structures at TA-21 were contaminated with asbestos and other chemicals and radioactive materials such as tritium, plutonium and americium. Demolition was not as easy as merely swinging a hammer or a wrecking ball and required thorough preparation and careful decontamination.

Crews segregated waste to minimize disposal costs, salvaged equipment when possible, and recycled 308 tons of 'clean' metal — that is, metal with no radiological contamination — before demolition began.

With demolition of the last building complete, crews will focus on packaging and transporting the waste generated by building demolition to disposal facilities by April 2011.